Error bars give a general idea of how precise a measurement is, or conversely, how far from the reported value the true (error free) value might be. If the value displayed on your barplot is the result of an aggregation (like the mean value of several data points), you may want to display error bars.

Bar plots with error bars are very frequently used in the environmental sciences to represent the variation in a continuous variable within one or more categorical variables. These are not always straightforward to make with the base functions in R. This page introduces you to making these plots with the package ggplot2.